

THE BEACH/HORSE APPLES

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A collection of original poetry

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ENCYCLOPEDIA KID

There is nothing to pray for. No parents float away
with a family fortune. Lemon grass, on the lawn,
tangles an umbrella. Birds eat. Holidays are wonderful,
though not as gay as in the albums. Stalactites and stalagmites
grow. Beneath us, in aquifers, who knows what there is?
But I'm smart. I can knot my shoes. I light a fuse and run away.
Aliens have not been sighted in my town, but fifty miles west
three farmers disappeared. For what? What could we pray for?
There are moments of saddening kindness, psychic moments
when Mom and Dad unite, and moments when I'm crystal
being crushed by a horse.

DINNER

The mother inside my refrigerator
is a small, tight woman. Her body congeals,
and she combs her hair in short strokes.
At dinnertime, burnt meat demands attention,
and the mother shrinks smaller
until she curls behind a carrot
in the vegetable drawer.
Dinner hums its crackling tune,
and the mother retreats, but I feel her
dearly. Hopes lying at the bottom of the ocean
cannot describe the type of anchor
this mother is. Her love wanders
and is devastating. It is a drunk
holding up newspaper stands.
There is much more to say and yet
only one thing to say ever,
and from the fridge this shy mother
hugs my finger and passes me butter
because, it's true, I'm hungry.
And is there something better than that
and more inward? And where?
Dinner is a train that drops me off unnoticed.
Mother is a star in the sense that she is small
and emits light and is a gravitational dock.
O how dark a field seems at night
when flowers close.

THE BEACH

THE EMBER

Along the coast, we lit tobacco fields.

We followed a pack of bulldogs.

Our private moments, of praying in each other's bodies,
were sought behind billowing tapestries.

A barge approached us

overflowing with sleepers

who held out contracts. We took on morose looks.

Our private moments became louder.

When the barge landed the moon grew middle aged.

Our bulldogs died.

Gods, for days, fought each other in heaven.

Wagons came. Horses, vermin,

and trees all died.

A nickel spinning on its side wobbled to a halt.

An opera house with walls of fire

rose up from a grass seed.

MY GUN

is my hermit, my Chicago Bull. I walk into The Yale Club
and shoot geishas. Sun is shining through light snowfall.
Skeletal horses paint my reverie. My gun is forty-five calibers.
My gun is a moose jaw and a Howitzer canon. I walk
into The Yale Club and shoot Jon Bon Jovi. Sun shines
through the ashen downpour. Mother Theresa,
somewhere in South America, blesses plywood coffins.
My gun is James Bond. My gun is a nuclear warhead
the size of Atlantis. I walk into The Yale Club
and shoot myself eight times. My gun is every day.
My gun is light reflecting off the ocean. My gun is a stain
on the beach, and waves beat it, and crabs, in vain,
try to dig it up. I paint a picture of The Yale Club,
and my brush rests, and my paint dries, and I wait
for Tomorrow to ride a riverboat into gun country
where “country” means “gun,” and “gun” means
something like, “free parking,” or “safe parking,”
or “don’t park here. You’ll die.”

IF THERE WERE A SONG ABOUT THIS CAR RIDE

it would start: love didn't exist yet or: love was but a child then,
the winter I discovered whiskey, stout beer, and cigar leafs

I had a crush on Maggie I planted landmines beneath the snow
and left my car: to burn in a horse field there goes fall

there goes late spring and summer there goes my romantic epoch
skittering down the road what chance did I have? what tires

became free from ice? a bed-sheet rope tied itself to my windowsill
and I clambered downward: winter argued with night a pillow crept

over the mouth of dawn as a fruit bat: I thrived upside down my well
pulled up buckets of dry ink: my well pulled up buckets of oil

AUTOPSY

I look into the corpse's eyes, and there, I see men tossing fish to each other.
I see an octopus

being wrestled from a human hand. Every year, books are printed
with instructions on how to swim,

and we sink anyway. We drown. What are the odds that a man cannot float?
That the air rejects him? That gravity's weight turns him into a diamond?

What are the odds that God exists? And that there are holes on Earth
big enough to be oceans? At the morgue where the corpse is deposited,

men walk sideways like crabs, sliding bodies in and out of the refrigerator.
Good heavens, the men say, these corpses contain air, light, and free space.

DIG

We make holes in the sand
because there are clams
in there, and if I could do this
all over, I'd have flown you here
sooner to tour the coast.
I used to be here when I was young.
It was important. You know,
if I could do this all over,
we wouldn't be here. We'd be waking up
in a house that overlooks the beach.
We'd walk to town for lobsters,
lemons, and paper. Paper would be important
and part of almost everything.
But wait, if really I could do this all over,
there'd be just us and mountains,
mountains of clams and crabs cooking
because of the sheer weight and friction.
What could I call these mountains?
If I dug into them with my hands,
removing one shell at a time
towards the heart, the hot core,
how long would it be until I reached the meat?

MEMORIES OF COTTAGE

Little things like walking to the coffee table
took hours if prep-time was counted.
Trophies were on the floor everywhere.
My toes were bandaged. My socks had holes.
Those summers, I stepped on gold and rocks.
I saw an island out my window strewn with brush
and little lights. I thought I'd go. I thought
I'd befriend things there like lightning bugs,
with luminescent powder in their pants
and face-sized eyes to gleam hints across water.
I wanted to marry one. I wanted us to kiss
with a priest down the aisle and dance. All that.
I built my August legacy as Sand Prince, the guy
who slept when it was warm and was a firefly's groom
while his family sat here for the season.

WESTWARD HO!

Sappy San Francisco: my friends succumbed
to your thumb-picked melody. You offer
a prehistoric land where one can befriend lizards
and maybe lie with a descendant of the swan.
Time was when a boy took months to go anywhere.
Time was when cliffs weren't easily bridged,
and dust wore through people's skulls. But now
we're rarely screwed. We're dry and non-incestuous.
"Take the train," Mom says, to the western shore
where the promise of a better life has been fulfilled.
It's neither too hot nor too frigid. It's lush. It all
seems to be just Fine with a big capital F.

FATHERS' FATHERS' MARCH

Our grandpas grew up
killing other boys' grandpas.
Bunches of them walked,
fur hats tugged down,
keeping tallies of the vermin
that they shot. Grandpas
came from houses made of grass,
from far away, from crawl space rooms
with no latrines. They got here by selling cheese,
and garments they sewed together.
And they liked each other.
Our grandpas painted rustic nudes
of other grandpas among the wild grass.
Acting as each other's subjects,
they donned veils and posed in rock-forts
where light was let to shine through cracks
and off their naked figures.
Once, our grandpas lived
together in a colony.
A fire among our grandpas
caused them all to put it out.
After a long watering,
they danced their buddies through
and through the moods of rising steam.
Then, some returned to cots to sleep,
and others contentedly rested in holes.

SAGE STICK

Smoking rose-flavored cigarettes
on a roof in Boston,
I did impressions of my friends
and they laughed. Back then we were all so
depressed. There was a giant,
frozen-over wet spot on the roof
and in the backs of our minds
a fear that we could slide to our deaths.
We didn't, and as our party depopulated,
I sidled up to the roof's edge
and looked at the stars and found it difficult
to cry because of the cold air.
On the frozen wet spot, a fight
broke out. Two guys wearing t-shirts
screamed and swatted each other's faces
with their eyes crossed and their lips bloody.
Down they fell onto the ice,
pummeling each other's heads.
This is one of many memories
in which I stole, in which I appropriated
a night's dull soul for my art project.
Later, at a Chinese Restaurant,
I ate orange chicken, wishing
that the restaurant too were outdoors
and that the flames, the spatulas,
and the chef's cries lived in moonlight.
The restaurant was loud,
and a couple kissed in the corner

next to piles of Styrofoam trays
and fortune cookies and garbage.
In the window, the sky began to brighten.
The sun rose, stars faded,
and a deformed, million-legged stallion
galloped over the city, sticking its hooves
with broken green glass.

UNSTUCK

We're at a celebration of sex in sedans.

There are champagne fountains with glass angels on top,
whose wings are feathers from South America,
where doves rise like a cloud,
and some become food and others, decoration.

"Sex in Sedans," the banner reads.

The wine is chilled and the made-up angels
sit atop the fountain
blessing us, the lovers.

We've been lucky.

Some have screwed sprawled out on the hoods of sedans
or balled up in the confines of the trunks;
and some have made love while the sedans were moving
full-speed down country roads
with rocks and clay
kicking up into the air. Somebody,
pull our bodies apart.

Let us walk free.

BARN PAINT

We drove and Shane had nothing for a shirt.
He danced in snakey ways, and hills,
trees, reservoirs, and spots to pee
passed. He yelled, it's hot. We stopped
for gas and spent some extra time discussing
gatorades, spit, and red vs. grape vs.
arctic frost. Let's look for paint, he said,
let's squiggle heinous tags all down the barn.
Holding up my cell phone's screen that night,
I watched him paint intensely. I listened to him
complain about his brother's soaked basement
and the knives that were hidden down there
next to dusty synthesizers. That night
was voodooish. Furnace smells rose
while Shane worked. He turned our spot
beside the barn into a little hell
where we were no longer friends or people
at all, just boys with hands
painting a barn that wasn't ours.

ROLLING IN SAND

Plums talk. Woody voices
come from near their pits.
A boy, in love, searches for a pit,

pressing his fingers
below a girl's chest.
He feels beneath her ribs.

He bends, unwilling to compromise,
toward her belly.
She hears from inside the boy,

lung talk foaming past a jetty.
She sees the top of his head
and feels his stuttering mouth.

CAPSULE

Moneymen paid Julie big bucks
to paint explosions in their lobby,

ones that faced out towards the cardboard-
and-tear gas crowd. She made

cartographic bird confetti. She gave
her mural flight plans, phosphor holes, and

swamps yapping next to straight-faced
ghosts of biology diagrams.

Powerful Julie worked in this armpit,
fingertipping rockets

into surrounding corn rows. Epicenters
met. Flakes, shaven off, whirled. Julie lived

on this map in an invisible capsule
with comets and streamers digging

her a podium. There were flight
delays. There were comings and leafings.

There were prices, lasers, rises, drops,
and in the end it was like listen,

may death be alright
and reincarnation an upgrade.

AFTERNOON FROM HELL

This is true. We relaxed on big tongue
loungers, waiting for ants to climb up

and eat us crumbs. The ballgame was slow, so we snuck
down to these boob shaped ottomans, and this guy

starts coming, not like a sex thing, but like he doesn't believe
we could burst into a phone booth and come out so super

relaxed. So we're on the tongue couches and boob stools
and this guy's coming, not like sex though, and the ants

didn't eat us yet, and we're pissed
at the ballgame, and the guy gets to us.

What a bunch of white dwarves, he says,
and I say hey, we're relaxed, and I'm not afraid

to sleep right here in front of you.
I woke up sprawled across three boobs

and one of the tongues, ants everywhere, ballgame still on,
no guy, no sex, not relaxed.

It was just me shielding my body's
ant holes and looking for a way back

to the red river and all the little levers
that serve us sand.

SELF PORTRAIT AS A PHOTOGRAPHED CORPSE

Where is my body-length scarf, the one woven
from sparkling tarlatan? Where is my cloak? The skin one?
I could fit in a hand-me-down trunk, and I could fit in a duffel.
My t-shirt is silkscreened, my crooked head looks like Mars. In a darkroom,
my pictures hang. My soul's journey was short and blank.
I remember escalators and lights. I remember a phoenix,
or a brief, immortal flash. I see myself folding
newsprint in the sky. I see a buffalo-hide cape
draped over my shoulders. Piles of dead humans
are photographed and inventoried, and dots, invariably,
get connected. I disavow dots.
I disavow urns of ash. Periods end good sentences.
Pyramids make good tombs. Flashbulbs snap and curl,
and I'm in photos, hunched over, dead.

HUB

We're all here, fucking in the train station, behind the pipes,
behind the walls. We do it because we're new. We do it
because we've spent lifetimes walking bags through here.
We love and hate the closeness of our homes. The nation's
evergreens rise and die. This fucking will never cease, we say.
These fuckings will never cease. Throughout the restrooms,
we shake hands. Addresses change. Secrets are pushed down
into the parcels that we bear. Our coats open. We wait
for the train's electricity. The tunnel's air is hot. It spits
the city's quiet pollen.

BONE

You're such a fluorescent light bulb,
you howler, you crackpot. You bleach
while, in private, I douche myself.
You squeal. You perspire when it's cold.
I want to sharpen you into a pen
or scabbard. I want to scoop your marrow.
You're a swimmer, bone.
You're a pretty anorexic. You hang
with grace and ring like peonies.
Spread yourself on my picnic blanket.
Mistake my laugh for a yawn. Oh, bone,
carve me another. Your jokes are riddles,
and your riddles are jokes.

DADDY CRISIS

Nothin' to see here: just houses
built by fathers, fathers who ran
to Florida, fathers panning for gold
in an old creek. What did your father do?

Mine chewed houses down to the marrow.
To Florida he ran: left notes about gold
hiding underground somewhere near Earth's mantle
or core. Dad once told me to dim my lights

and breathe more softly into my microphone.
Away, I fled from him: towards The South
where manliness still reigns
with a big pointer-finger. Daddy got fired.

Daddy crossed the border of Hell
and cooked shrimp with Satan. Daddy's guitar
cost him a lot. What was Father's favorite song?
A goose showed up at the door

with three notes, signed: Daddy, Father, and Dad
respectively. All were about The Devil
going down to Georgia. What does Georgia matter?
What does gold matter?

Blast open the mountain, Father.
Reach for the gold. Free the coal.
Ignore the promises waiting underground.
There's a rawness in life that wants to be held that's hard to hold.

GIFT SONG

I will care for you and give you lots of grain doors.
Grain doors that once held back grains and slid
open to create hourglass effects. Now, they suppress
light and air and contrast the minimal furniture
that stands in the corner by the window. Grain Door.
Grain Door. They will be white and wear rusted corners.
Snakes won't reach you. The doors will sit flush
with the floor and will need no pillows to dampen voices
or to soak up seeping flood waters. Badgers won't reach you.
The grain doors I give you will glide through a succession
of audible clinks. What you have will stay. Nothing
will get to you. I'll miss you. That won't change. I wish
I'd dug my way away from you and a tunnel connected us,
a tunnel for lying in at night.

FAREWELL MY FRIEND, I LOVED YOU

When a friend is like an old goat, and you
are like a walker, walking him calmly
to the killing barn and tuning out his drivel,
a death march is afoot. Even crows,
whose whole existence is dappled in darkness,
must laugh at you and your pal, who carry on
stupidly down the gravel. Both of you are aware
that a change is coming, a change away
from how things used to be. A split in a sapling.
The tug that finally breaks Siamese twins.
On hills, looking at each other with spyglass,
hatred wells up. That's life. That's our folly
on Earth where our desires are kept cleanly
by each morning storm. Farewell my friend,
I loved you. And in an instant, ants crawl
from the bath drain, and, frightened, you run
to find some poison and a rubber plug.

ON SECRET LOVE

My secret love lives among ice plants.
I think about her choosing clothes
and oiling her home appliances.
In the sunny ether, songs exist
between her and me, and at night
the city rings with the faint percussion
of her head hitting pillows. She passes
her ring finger worriedly over her jaw
because she is fed up like me. In this life,
aggression and lust bustle below us
as in a port town. My secret love is awake
or sleeping with the lights on. I drive
through downtown streets and imagine
the moment of her birth. Floorboards creak
outside my room when I read. My secret love
crashes through my dreams like a toy hammer.
I feel her kick. I watch her napping on the deck
of a limestone bridge. The streets peacefully
choke on salt. The sewers are overwhelmed by hair.
My secret love whirls through her living room all night
like snow conquering a smokehouse.

ON BEING DENIED FROM HELL

I pray to The Devil, the man downstairs,
for no more tremendous ass-beatings, but again
he drags me through the front yard's toys,

the snakes, the moles, the plastic cars,
and, sickly-like, I take his beating
with promises pouring from my mouth.

Stumbling back across the gate's entrance, I greet The Devil,
and there I go again, dragged
about the mulch and fallen pineapples,

over to the patch of garden
with all its pinecones and all the thirsty hands
reaching from below,

pulling me down. Hell is like beef,
sunburnt skin, and raspberries.
Hell is like roses with thorns.

LONG WEEKEND AT BURLINGTON

Outside tinkled, frozen hell style.
A cross section of our snowy house
would show us trumpeting around
downstairs and making progress
towards couches and other upholstered pits.
Mom and Dad heard our shiftiness
and let it fly. We were the only humans
on a little moon for two miles in every direction.
Snowshoes made us drunken ants.
Headlamps made us stars. We played
snow angels and sex angels
and drink until you pee, and we skipped
back to our house, colliding with love seats
at full velocity, a way of exploring life's limits.
Let's do more in this snowy prick.
Let's chronicle what it's like to be around each other
while sleeping poorly. Let's produce
a canonical pamphlet that includes
raised lettering, plastic maps, a whole corner
that's obviously rolling papers,
and a three-dimensional interview
of me and all my friends about being
with each other and having nothing going on.

SHEEP WOMAN/NEW YORK

The Sheep Woman is here! And that means true love
because The Sheep Woman and I were an item
until she got back with her New York boyfriends.

She must stay! But The Sheep Woman goes always
to her feasts and carnal clam bakes
where I assume she wears red lace. It's sad!

I squat in an orchard and wait for metaphorical fruit
to crush my head. Pears. Grapefruit. Poison apples.

And, still, I can't find a good pair of pants. Ugh!
New York, I hate you. Your boyfriends are rude
on purpose.

HORSE APPLES

DEAR CATERPILLAR

You are my large intestine,
my wind-walking Zamboni,
my queen—waiting for day to break
into chunks of seedy pomegranate.
You soar on your kite string
and burrow into blankets.
For how long can the breeze carry you?
How do you survive
your impossible windfall?
When you chew a leaf,
Caterpillar, I thank Christ
you are not my size.
I ask myself, in what cocoon
will I sleep when I stop maturing?
What stage will I burst from?
And who will shine the spotlight
on me emerging, finally,
from my decanter of muscle and hair?

DEAR THROAT

If you are not a church hall,
what are you? If you are not
a hog-treaded path to my stomach
then I don't know you, I don't
know your name, and my foolishness
is finally confirmed. O throat,
you pull tomatoes through
my body. Your muscles undulate
like fog around a bee's nest. Why
do I prep myself with olive oil
when trying to swallow?
Why do I fight the passage
of saliva? Still, the flap
behind my nose reminds me
of a young moth trying on
dinner gloves. I love my throat.
I want to close off its corridors
and embalm the rest: the corners,
tanned pocketbooks, and king
mattresses forever.

MUSLIN

I would wrap babies in you. I would wrap
women's faces in you. I see a clay pot, neglected
on a fire, and I would wrap that in you too.
You seem cozy. You seem like grass,
and I am sure that when pixies build their nests,
they search for you from closet to closet.
You seem ancient like one who travels
village to village selling incense to children
whose mothers waits in shadowed chairs.
I get this sense of oppression from you, muslin,
because I will never "get" you. I will never
wear a gown. I try you on, muslin, but what a joke.
What a clown I am. Throw me in a barrel
and wish me goodnight. I love you
because you are a word that makes me powerless.
I want to push you until my hands break
and my knees swing like loose hammocks.
I want to pour wine onto my tongue
and meet you in an amphitheater. You sleep,
muslin, without knowing. You wake to find yourself
sewed into a bride's glove or cut loosely
into a pair of summertime pants.

AIRPLANE SONG

O combustible life! the smell of gasoline
is wafting towards my seat,

and I need more time. More meat!
I need to paint my nails and find my hair

a perfect comb. Maybe soak my feet in vodka?
Bands of fuel bleed from engines

onto Nebraska corn. I'll vaporize.
I'll scream. My ashes, ferried by jet stream,

will land in places rather un-unique.
Here, before I perish, is something

from a spiritual newsletter:
I am paper. I am a matchbook

in the forest. There is resin yet
to be wiped from earth, but we're done.

We're done! Airplane rains down. I fly
on the backs of brainless herons.

SPACEMAN

Back at your house,
Spaceman barges in with fruit.

Unwrapping pears, he warns you
of small dark things, unseen

by telescopes, landing in the oceans
and rainforests. Surely life from beyond exists.

We are ants to them, Spaceman says, ants.
He sits. Your room is cold.

There are gods within the makeup of space and time
as sure as there are dust and light and fawns.

Spaceman kisses you, saying
he doesn't love. He kisses you

saying he doesn't kiss. He says
he isn't there, it's only you,

bed sheets, marbles,
and the mouth of the universe,

you and the lighted gap
beneath the door.

TERMINATOR II: JUDGMENT DAY

I looked at my past and cried. Everything
between my body and Los Angeles

quickly turned to bees nests. Dr. Frankenstein
felt this way after he screwed the bolts

into the sides of his monster's neck and pulled
the lighting chain. His darling assistant loved him,

but cried. His monster burned to death in a windmill.
Our creations bite us in the ass. They set fences

between us, and they heat the atmosphere
by many degrees. We're left alone to be rinsed

down a driveway. We're left alone to let the breeze
erode statues of ourselves that look cut

from slabs of post-apocalyptic dryer lint.

FLAKE

Sunset came. The Chrysler Building grew antsy,
like, hey I'm not so sure, my other friends,
they might be going to this show and blah blah blah,
or maybe I should show my face, at like, this thing
for work. We know the Chrysler Building doesn't work,
he doesn't go to shows at dance clubs. Maybe
I should stand around without you guys, he said.

I should have love affairs with people less afraid to hug.
I don't know. Do I have family? Is it bad,
what I've chosen? Whatever. Every now and then
I dream of what it would be like to be a dog,
to sleep in a crate and get let out and wag my tail.
Imagine me. Last name: Building, First name: Chrysler.
You come home. You let me out, and then I slink
worm-like across the floor to the main entrance
where I topple down the step to do a pee
or sniff incredulously at the neighbor's lilac tree.

THOUGHTS ON A NEST OF CROWS

They peck themselves into the wall like darts
or postcards from a son who lives in hell.
These birds, they kiss with their whole heads.

They hang out in their bricks, their sleeping bags,
with neon signs above. No grass, no worms.
No mothers waiting by a phone just in case.

A boy has done this. I know. One from somewhere
where the basement closets hide taxidermy,
and lamplights only shine in shades of red.

The ponds in his park have black feathers on top,
disguising the evidence of frogs, the reflections of trees,

and the glassy constellations that live wide among
the other, unnamed patterns in the stars.

THE GUY

This wizard has his hands on my sister.
His touch could make acorns fall from a tree.
He creates light in his palm, and forces it upward
in a sickening flair. I don't know him.
I see him rolling a comet in his scaly fingers.
My sister and the wizard are rowing
a boat, and a picnic materializes. A glazed pig
with an apple in its mouth lays on the cloth.
If God sinks their boat, I'll call the navy for my sis,
but the wizard needs to cool it. Let him ride a bubble
to the bottom of the sea. Let him cry inside.
Let his magic tears fog the bubble
and make it look, from far away, like an orb,
a man-sized pearl buried in the silt
of the Mariana Trench.

THE ARRIVAL

We hear her name is Mary Ann. She bursts through the door surrounded by midnight and a sidewalk halo. She's clutching two magnums of white wine bought just now, after hours, down the street. A cold breath flies out of her across our noses, across our laps and she finishes a "hello," that she started after she became fully grown human, minutes ago, outside the wine store. She picks up her bottles, throws on a coat, and pushes herself through our door's archway.

"Whose girlfriend is she etc. etc."

ARGUMENT AND VISION

In the western reaches of Mexico
mother and father drill into me
that tourists are brought to jail or sold
into some white slavery

mother and father trust me
I've been among the carefulest boys
the downright cream of the crop
top of the ladder

undeniably I'm grown
it would take helicopters
bulls and machines
to capture me and cram my body into a trunk
mother and father trust me
no one exists who is big enough
nothing resembling such exists

though your worst nightmare version of me
shoots craps in an astroturfed hotel
and is on an acid dose and screaming

that's against my nature
only a distortion seen sometimes
a dream where I turned out cool
a fat guy playing pool
an asshole a surfer a child who woke up one day with friends
who finds glory in the loosening of life
the slow figuring out of things

ON JEALOUSY

You haven't spoken to your friends in years.

You've heard of their occupations. You've seen

their family photos. You want to wake up in a salt mine

with a tarp over your head. You want to catch up on science fiction

in order to revisit extraterrestrials and all the fear they've caused.

Exoskeletons were fun.

Tentacles always surprised you when they sprung correctly.

Your inner child might reach its conclusion

if you run to the control panel as fast as you can,

if you remember who you are.

A button in front of your face reads: Airlock Disengage.

What happened to your friends and why on Earth did they float away?

THE MINE

Ghosts waited. They entered tents. They entered hillside shower-stalls where plastic curtains were strung above. The living and the dead sat outside, betting.

Ghosts wrote down directions. Walking on the interstates, they held candles, wore headlamps, and balanced the sun above cases of clouds. What mattered was seeing the sky. What mattered was feeling for worms. The ghosts mined until what slept beneath them was deep water and echoes of manmade flame.

Ghosts dug trouble. They built basements beneath their graves. The ghosts sat and listened to faucets drip. They clicked their little lighters. The ghosts did not come back for questioning. They did not come back.

DUSK WALK

I'm in the sand and lost. A distant party's
being wild. I hear the band. I see the light

that vents above the neighborhood. A stag leads
its white-tailed fawns down to bite the mosses that poke

through rocks, that rise from drifts of sterile wood.
Some bats come sit with us. The party's lights turn red

and blue and round like eyes. The deer, the bats,
and I warm up by pressing against

each other. Rain will find us. Tides will flush
us out. The party will disperse its embers

all around to bedroom fires, and I
will walk to see the blue-lit beast that was

its house. I'll wait and wait and look at it
until my corpse becomes a cloud, and then

I'll drift above, against the summer night,
so oddly bright, so oddly in decay.

COME UP

I am biking up a hill toward a great-grandfather who hates me. The hill is the wettest,
sun soaked thing

I've ever ridden up, and buses of townspeople line the streets.

They'll see me hated

by the great-grandfather. They'll see that hair dye has blackened his nails.

Your ass is grass, he will say, your ass is pussy-willow weeds.

I am biking up a hill towards a Caribbean place where silk sheets billow in the trees.

My mask is black and has straw whiskers.

Its mouth is the widest, reddest thing I've ever seen on my face.

Toucans throw coconuts

onto hot-dog tourists cavorting in the shade.

Farmers'-market stalls line the rim of an eggcup.

I'm biking up a hill towards a heavenly lamp. A circle of townspeople rides up around me.

For now, I hum a song from a chain-gang movie.

I hum a part about beating rocks and swallowing sand.

When we reach the lamp, I'll introduce myself to the townspeople.

When we're up there, crying in a pack around the lamp's glass,

I'll shake their hands and say my name.

WITCHING

I shape my hands
around a cherry tree's trunk
and pray to Jupiter, the planet,
for a wound.
I want my friends destroyed.
I want a cabana in the forest to uncurl for me.
Why do we need two lives?
In the sky, there are great holidays
when comets strike
larger terrestrial bodies.
I want to be an astronomer
who celebrates these holidays.
I want the curtains
to be ripped off my body and neutered.
With the odor of heaven so strong,
how can those of us waiting in the infield
stand to exist? The universe
is a diamond. I am a donkey.
Hope rests in my heart, unfinished.

REVIVAL

I fell in love in a crypt. The back door was a waterfall,
and love-making was in the mist—
two jellyfish becoming one. Old records floated in the eddies.
I saw a swing-revival single

that had a rose on the front cover
playing trombone. Remember the True Love revival?
Everyone in New York City gathered at the foot of the Pan Am Building;
everyone in San Francisco gathered at the foot of the Golden Gate Bridge;

everyone in Hollywood
gathered under the bones of the Hollywood sign.
Men unleashed doves from tiny hand-made stages. I was there.
Those were the days of my romantic inclinations. I thought about charm.

I dreamed of having a girlfriend whose earthly value I could understand.
I thought about driving across amethyst flats
and having a peripheral life. It was me, my bodily urges, life's stillness, and love
coexisting on a vague and dried-out American Gothic.

Intended to be blank

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